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## Finley-Led A's: Nancy Finley Interview Part II

March 25, 2011  
 by Paul Ferrante

### Summary

*Nancy Finley's father, Carl, served as A's owner Charlie Finley's right-hand man during the A's stay in Kansas City all the way through to Finley's sale of the team in 1980. This architect of the Oakland powerhouse teams of the 1970s was recruited by his cousin, Charlie, a real estate tycoon, from his position as a high school principal to run a professional sports franchise (with a handful of staff) for a mostly-absentee owner.*



*Nancy Finley would spend her teen years at his side, helping out wherever possible. This is the second and concluding segment of a two-part feature that tells her family's story of directing the fortunes of that legendary American League franchise. And, of course, you'll hear about the memorabilia she's retained from the era of Charlie Finley's Swingin' Oakland A's, including her prized possession, the 1974 World Series Trophy. (First part*

*appeared in the March 25 SCD.)*

**Sports Collectors Digest (SCD):** Your uncle was always coming up with new innovations, such as orange baseballs and the modified pitch count (three-ball walk/two-strike strikeout). Do you think these were discounted for personal reasons by the other owners?

**Nancy Finley (NF):** Oh, yes! Definitely. I remember how down Charlie seemed about how the other owners acted during each annual meeting. Around 1975, Charlie turned his voting proxy over to Dad. Dad started attending the owners' annual meetings from 1975 on in Charlie's place. This is how bad it became for Charlie. Now I read on Internet sites like Wikipedia, for example, where others take credit for our innovations, like the DH rule for the American League only, World Series games at night and geographic divisions within leagues. I guess this is the best form of flattery.

I can't remember off the top of my head who has taken credit for "our" innovations. Recently, while reading about another MLB person on Wikipedia, I noticed he took credit for World Series night games. Even in Bowie Kuhn's obit, in The Week magazine, it states Kuhn was commissioner when the DH came about. How ironic, considering Kuhn scoffed at this idea and gave us pure hell over it. Whoever wrote this Wikipedia piece was trying to put Kuhn in the same "innovative" light as the DH.

**SCD:** Did you have any interaction with your uncle's "Eyes and Ears" in Oakland, Stanley Burrell, who later came to be known as MC Hammer?  
**NF:** I remember MC Hammer, aka Stanley Burrell. Stanley went by the nickname

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sale was final, I noticed the front office staff went from about 8-10 people to 60-plus. It was becoming the way of most workplaces: political. I know Dad was concerned his name might be a liability. Charlie didn't have any ties with the team any longer; however, Charlie was still giving the occasional interview. Charlie also placed calls to Dad while he was working in the new A's office.

Why sad? Because this was all I had known my entire life. Because we were on the verge of another championship team. Because I wasn't sure if Dad could work without Charlie, the same as Charlie needed him. This only applied to the team. When it came to their other professions (Dad in education, Charlie in insurance sales) they did fine independently, but in running a MLB team, it appeared one couldn't do without the other. I don't think even Dad and Charlie realized it.

**SCD:** What was your involvement - if any - with the team after that?

**NF:** After the A's sale was final in November 1980, I attended social events with Dad for the team. My oldest son, Doug, was about 2 years old. I took Doug to games many times. I have a picture of Doug and Billy Martin's granddaughter playing on the front office floor. Doug enjoyed riding up and down the Coliseum elevator, which took people from the front office down to the clubhouse.

**SCD:** What mementos do you have from the KC/Oakland A's of the Charlie Finley years?

**NF:** Tons of photos. Baseballs, promo bats, autographed bats and balls, a gift of an autographed bat to Dad from the HOF, plaques to honor Dad, a gold-plated lifetime American League Pass to any A.L. stadium presented to Dad by the A.L. (Mr. MacPhail), World Series rings (men's and women's), documents, oddities like a leather wallet with a carving of Charlie "O" (our mascot) on one side and a K.C. player at bat on the other. It is a fold-over type wallet, made by an inmate in prison when we were in K.C.

I remember Dad brought one home, saying it was delivered to Municipal Stadium that day. Only two were made. Charlie took the other one. Whoever this prisoner was, he was a dedicated K.C. Athletics fan. The player on it has the green and gold uniform, so this prisoner must have really liked our new colors. I also have one of the last blankets worn by our mascot, Charlie "O," in Oakland. This blanket is currently on loan to an Athletics Sports History group in Kansas City.

**SCD:** What would you consider your greatest piece?

**NF:** Well, I also have Dad's 1974 A's World Series Trophy. This is one of the large trophies. We didn't have (or use) the "mini" World Series Trophies at the time. I keep this trophy in a bank vault.

I have an anecdote about this trophy, in case it is of interest. When Dad passed away in March 2002, I was devastated, of course. Later that summer, I heard how well the A's were doing. But I never heard anything mentioned about the 1970s in Oakland. I had mixed feelings about keeping Dad's memorabilia. It didn't feel like anyone remembered. I didn't use the Internet, and knew nothing about eBay.

A friend said if I wanted to put a piece of Dad's memorabilia on eBay as a test he would do this for me. I thought, why not?

This friend chose a 10-day eBay run. He suggested I choose a minimum amount. Since I had very mixed feelings, I chose a high minimum. The timing was purely coincidental. It turned out my World Series Trophy was on eBay the same time the 2002 A's entered the playoffs.

What happened next was a pleasant surprise. I had a different news reporter in my driveway every day. We had ABC, NBC, CBS and local affiliates. My eBay World Series Trophy auction turned out to be a parallel nightly news story to the 2002 A's playoffs.

Also to my surprise, the top offer for my trophy was \$323,000. I set the minimum higher than this amount, so I did not have to take the offer, and I did not accept this amount. At this point, I decided I should keep the trophy.

At the same time, the 2002 A's lost in the playoffs. Since then I have seen people offer other World Series trophies for auction. The prices don't reach my offer amount. I asked a well-known MLB memorabilia specialist, and his theory is the reason my trophy brought a higher dollar amount is because of its previous owner, and the story behind it.

Somewhere I have newspaper articles reflecting the latest offer amount for the trophy, but I haven't found it yet.

I have so much stuff. I did see information about my trophy auction on Google under "2002 eBay auction of Oakland A's 1974 World Series Trophy."

**SCD:** In addition to baseball, your uncle also had interests in pro basketball (the ABA Memphis Tams) and pro football (he tried to start a new league in 1987, the North America Football League), which would have incorporated the Canadian Football League. Were you privy to any discussions on these endeavors?

**NF:** I remember the Oakland Seals hockey team the best. This was formerly known as the California Golden Seals hockey team. The purchase was 1970-71. I remember Dad saying, "We have a hockey team now." Being from a hot climate, my family wasn't too familiar with hockey. Games were in the Oakland Arena, which is next door to the Coliseum. This was convenient.

I attended numerous Seals games in 1970-71, but it was so different from our A's. The seats were empty. People in the Bay Area didn't seem to accept hockey well. Now, the San Jose Sharks are huge. It has been suggested this is due to the increase in the Bay Area's population since 1970. I have noticed an increase in popularity of hockey in high schools, too.

Around this time, Dad said Charlie also purchased a basketball team in Tennessee. It seemed like Charlie believed if we could make a winning MLB team, the same could be done with other sports. Dad didn't share this belief. He was concerned it was spreading us too thin. Dad could not be part of the basketball team; it was just too much at once. He believed they needed to keep focusing on the A's. He felt the same way about the Oakland Seals hockey team.

Soon, Charlie sold both teams. It was after Charlie sold the A's that he became focused on the new football league. I still have the sweatshirt Charlie sent me with its logo. I believe this new football league had a good chance of success.

**SCD:** What happened to his experimental football inventions of the 1980s?

**NF:** You mean the yellow-striped football? Charlie wanted Dad to be part of this. He offered to help, and he and Charlie made several visits to local investors in this area. Charlie also sent prototype footballs to high school coaches, asking if they would let their team try this new football. The responses were glowing. I have many responses from high school coaches complimenting the new football. I also have news articles and photos showing high school teams with this football. Charlie sent us copies of the articles and letters sent or received. He was very excited about this project.

Earlier this year, I received an e-mail from a gentleman in Las Vegas who had recently purchased one of these footballs at a sports memorabilia convention, and he was pleasantly surprised to read it had sold as a collectible. I was able to authenticate what was said about his football, and add to it.

**SCD:** Recently, another controversial (and successful) owner, George Steinbrenner, died. A dialogue has begun about him being a Hall of Fame candidate. Should your uncle be considered?

**NF:** Charlie was nominated for the HOF, but didn't get in, in 2003. I would like to see Charlie nominated again to the HOF. The reason? First of all, compared to most other MLB franchises of late, we were pretty darn good. The bottom line is, we won three World Series in a row and made it to the 1971 and 1975 playoffs. How many teams can claim this record, except the Yankees?

I've read articles that dissect the reason for our playoff loss in 1975 to Boston. I have my own hypothesis on why we lost this playoff. It's just my personal observation. I was there. I plan to discuss this more in depth in my book.

Also, I hope Dad is nominated under the MLB Executive category in the HOF. I've seen other MLB executives nominated to the HOF who didn't have as much of an impact as he did. I have heard so often that if it wasn't for him, the A's wouldn't have gone as far as they did. Charlie was not present at the Oakland Coliseum to run day-to-day operations. It was Dad who was Charlie's long-distance link to the A's clubhouse, staff, the City of Oakland and Alameda County, the media (more in the late 1970s), and eventually the other owners.

Remember, he was a former high school teacher turned principal before changing careers to MLB. Charlie sold insurance and had started his own insurance company. Dad was at Charlie's side the years before Oakland, up to the championships, and after. He was a major part of



our three World Series wins, and our achievement of making it to the 1971 and 1975 playoffs. FYI, there is now a Facebook Fan Club devoted to my father.

On another note, I'm informed former MLB Commissioner Bowie Kuhn was nominated in 2002, and won a place in the HOF. The feud between Charlie and Kuhn was well known. I would like to comment about this issue. From my perspective, Kuhn abused his power as commissioner. Kuhn was against our well-intentioned innovations. He loathed the bright suits Charlie often wore. When it came to Charlie, and Oakland, it felt like Kuhn was not objective. If Kuhn deserves to be in the HOF, so does Charlie.

**SCD:** What prompted you to create the website [www.OaklandAthleticsHistory.com](http://www.OaklandAthleticsHistory.com)? What has been the reaction?

**NF:** I had the idea for the website when I wanted to do something to honor my family, especially my father. The A's were so much part of Dad's life. It isn't easy to leave one career at age 37 and start a new one in another state, in a completely different profession.

Also, I was so tired of reading the same old comments in the news about our time in MLB. Dad was a very private person. This is one reason no one heard much about our side of the story. Instead of complaining to my family, I thought I should do something about it.

I try to accent the positive on my website, with a few anecdotes added. For example, I exhibit a condolence letter from Supreme Court Justice J.P. Stevens. No one seems to realize Justice Stevens was the Athletics' legal counsel in our K.C. days. Dad knew Justice Stevens well.

**SCD:** Tell us about the book project you're undertaking regarding your experiences during the Charlie Finley era.

**NF:** The book is meant to tell what I remember about growing up within a MLB organization. When I mention some of my personal MLB experiences, people are amazed and amused. I realize my upbringing was not typical by any means. In addition, I hope to dispel some myths that seem to circulate within the press, over and over.

Previous books about Charlie have been so distorted and fail to tell the whole story. I find myself shaking my head, thinking, "It didn't happen that way." The self-styled baseball aficionados copy each other's assumptions without digging to see how it started and why it happened, and the motivations. The media makes the same mistake.

My book will be the untold story, so to speak. The backstory of Charlie Finley and what Sports Illustrated called "The Greatest Team of the Century." People will see Charlie in a new light. And some of that light will shine, as well, on the unseen hand ... my dad, Carl Finley.

**SCD:** What life lessons did you experience in baseball teach you?

**NF:** 1.) Never say, "No Comment" to the press; 2.) Never hang up on the press; and 3.) Don't expect others to be smart enough to understand.

I'm sure you'll agree that Nancy's experience with the A's of the Finley era will never be duplicated. I'm glad that, through the pages of our magazine, I was able to meet this interesting woman and hear her story. It's been fun sharing it with you. Until next time, please stay seated! u

(Collectors can write to Paul Ferrante at 23 Benedict Ave., Fairfield, CT 06825 or e-mail at [baseballjourney@optimum.net](mailto:baseballjourney@optimum.net).)



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